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### What a Difference a Death Makes

**Citation for published version:**

Rosie, M & Gorringer, H 2009, 'What a Difference a Death Makes: Protest, Policing and the Press at the G20', *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 14, no. 5. <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.2047>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.5153/sro.2047](https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.2047)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Sociological Research Online

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***Michael Rosie & Hugo Gorringe***

**What a difference a death makes:  
Protest, policing and the press at the G20**

**Abstract**

The casual observer of the controversy over policing at April 2009's G20 summit in London might have been forgiven for imagining that Britain's media serves as a bulwark against the abuse of power, fearlessly illuminating and condemning injustice. The publication of video footage and eye-witness accounts to heavy-handed protest policing has certainly raised the profile of this issue and led, concretely, to formal investigation of both individual police officers and to policing strategies more broadly. In this paper we examine the policing of protest, and in particular 'anti-systemic' protest, but also examine the role of the newspaper media in the interplay between police and protest. We argue that the media has often fomented and ignored the very 'abuses' they are now so eager to condemn. The key difference between coverage of the 2009 G20 summit and past such events, we contend, is the tragic death of an innocent bystander which has shifted the way in which the media has framed events.

## Introduction

*The initial media perception of the police operation [at the G20 in London] was predominantly positive with comment being made about the restraint shown by the officers involved. Following the death of Ian Tomlinson, however, the focus changed.*

(Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary 2009: 65)

Controversy surrounding the policing of the G20 Summit in April 2009 led to intense scrutiny of public order policing tactics, to criminal charges being considered against individual junior officers, and to several formal inquiries. To the casual observer the London G20 may have seemed to reveal Britain's (or at least London's) police as, at best, undisciplined and overly aggressive and, at worst, wantonly contemptuous of ordinary people. To the same observer the role of Britain's media in revealing police indiscipline and in holding the authorities to account might have offered an exemplar of the fourth estate in action. However, and as we will argue, what differentiated policing at the G20 from numerous prior protests was not so much what happened on the day, not so much the tactics or the behaviour of the police, as the reaction and aftermath to the death of an innocent bystander. It was the newsworthiness of an entirely avoidable fatality that focussed media attention on long-standing tactics of protest policing – mass detention in 'corrals', the removal of police identification numbers, and an aggressive stance towards anyone caught up 'in the protest zone'. As we shall argue here, culpability for police tactics and for their consequences lie, at least in part, with the self-same media who so convincingly damned them *after* the event.

In 2005 the UK hosted an important international summit, the G8, which brought together the world's most powerful leaders, and which was the focus of mass protest. Security was high and, as police officers were drafted in from across the UK, a capital city braced itself for unprecedented protests. The diverse strands of the global justice movement were represented in a succession of radically different marches, rallies, conferences and forms of protest. These ranged from a massive Edinburgh demonstration by the *Make Poverty History* coalition, to attempts to breach the perimeter fence around the Gleneagles Hotel, to aggressive stand-offs between police and protestors. As the dust settled, the police celebrated a successful operation and were applauded by the news media. Others, however, contested this version of events and condemned police tactics. On sites like *Indymedia* police were said to have dispensed with identification numbers; to have corralled protestors and bystanders for several hours without water or toilets (a controversial tactic known as 'kettling'); made arrests and collected personal details and fingerprints apparently without adequate reason; and to have acted aggressively towards both protestors and passers-by. All of these types of instance were witnessed, independently, by both current authors. Photos showed police shoving onlookers with shields and raising batons against protestors. Mainstream media were, by and large, entirely uninterested in such concerns.

Fast forward four years and the UK again hosted an international summit in a capital city. Police were drafted in and protests anticipated. Once again a

mainstream, set-piece march passed off uneventfully in the prelude to demonstrations with more radical demands. On 1 April 2009, as world leaders gathered for the G20 summit, a man caught up amidst protesters and police in central London collapsed and, having received emergency attention, died en route to hospital. Police and protestors traded charges about their responses – the police tactic of ‘kettling’ or containing people within a given area was condemned by activists who in turn were accused of throwing objects at police medics attending the dying man. Beyond these recriminations, there initially seemed to be nothing untoward about this tragic loss of life which was rapidly attributed to ‘natural causes’.

There the matter may, and probably would, have ended but for the intervention of numerous activists, passers-by and onlookers who came forward to state that the man in question had been in an altercation with the police shortly before collapsing. Over the following days and weeks an increasing number of accounts emerged that painted a very different picture of events. As details came to light, the way in which protest policing was reported began to shift to a point where several inquiries into police action were launched and the *Sunday Times* suggested that ‘parts of the Metropolitan police were out of control during the protests’ (Gourlay & Leppard 2009). In early July, the report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary called for a national overhaul of protest policing and questioned the British police’s ability to manage an event like the Olympics (Booth 2009).

Our focus in this paper is one of the key contexts within which political demonstrations occur. Such contexts include the particular location and its prior history of protest and/or public order; the political situation with regards to political rights, political dissent and policing; the specific history between particular police forces and particular kinds of protestor. Each of these was, of course, crucial to the way in which both protestors and police prepared for and acted on the days of demonstration around the G20. Our focus here, however, is a broader context: mass media coverage *prior* to the demonstrations, specifically within ‘mainstream’ newspapers.

The shock and outrage characterising newspaper articles in the aftermath of the G20 suggested that ‘police brutality’ is always unacceptable and inexplicable. However, it was not the policing that differentiated the G20 in 2009 from past events so much as the tragic outcome of police tactics and media interpretation of them. Indeed, up till the 2 or 3 April, the G20 offered a mirror image of previous international summits held in the UK (such as that in Gleneagles, 2005) in terms of both coverage and policing. The death of Ian Tomlinson (a 47 year old newspaper vendor) prompted a range of inquiries into police actions, but there has been less analysis of the role of the press. This paper argues that sensationalised predictions and coverage of protest events should also be subjected to critical scrutiny. We address the literature on policing, protest and media and draw on a close analysis of coverage leading up to and succeeding the G20 to argue that the press play a key role in police/protestor relations. We conclude that protest events need to be contextualised by reference to how they are reported as well as how they are policed.

## ***Protest, Policing and the Press***

Over the past few decades in Western democracies there has arguably been a move towards less confrontational protest policing (Della Porta & Reiter 1998, Gillham & Marx 2000, Waddington & King 2005). In Britain this trend dates back to the Scarman Report which concluded that the 1981 Brixton riot was partly a reaction to aggressive policing, and advocated a new code of conduct. Similar processes elsewhere fostered demands for more accountability and fed into dialogue-based approaches to protest policing such as ‘negotiated management’ (Della Porta & Reiter 1998, Vitale 2005). Negotiated management emphasises the need for cooperation and communication between police and protestors and aims to pre-empt violence by removing cues and actions that could inflame sensitive situations. The approach is premised on a constructive relationship between police and demonstrators and emphasises the right to protest. Negotiated solutions include the facilitation of protests and a toleration of disruption to public life.

Negotiated management as a police philosophy is an attempt to maintain public order whilst retaining legitimacy and democratic freedoms (Della Porta & Fillieule 2004, Vitale 2005). It also reflects research showing that repressive policing is often counter-productive (Earl 2003, Reicher et al 2004). As Gillham & Marx (2000: 212) note, however, there are multiple factors - including training and attitudes, the legal context and media presence - which shape the policing of any particular protest event. Negotiated management, thus, may not be applied in every context – D. Waddington (2007: 16) notes how the desire to avoid direct confrontation has spawned a range of ‘preventative measures, of varying degrees of overtness and legality’ - and may not work if it is applied.

Given the various factors that come into play when a protest coincides with international summits, Ericson & Doyle insist that ‘the policing of protest at international events must be understood and researched as a distinctive category’ (1999: 605). Such events, they note, heighten security concerns and government intervention. P. Waddington’s (2003: 411) distinction between ‘on the job trouble’ (referring to police deployment) and ‘in the job trouble’ (referring to the political fallout from contentious operations) is useful here. Fear of the latter can harden police attitudes and impose greater restrictions on protest constituencies. From this perspective one would expect international summits to be characterised by greater tension between protestors and police, but this is not uniformly the case. In both 2005 and 2009 certain marches during the course of an international summit offered text-book exemplars of the negotiated management approach. In 2005, the Make Poverty History march – the largest demonstration ever seen in Scotland – passed off without a single protest related arrest. Likewise the rally by Church groups, Trades Unions and NGOs called *Put People First* in March 2009 passed off without incident and was fully facilitated by the police.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly there is a need for more nuanced analysis of ‘summit policing’. Indeed, King & Waddington (2005) and Sheptycki (2005) have applied the ‘flashpoints model’ to examples of global protest, and argue that a number of key variables affect the outcome of such events. D. Waddington et al’s (1989:

22) ‘flashpoints model’ reinforces the necessity of examining the wider context within which public disorder occurs and is framed. The model conceives of six inter-related ‘levels of structuration’ – structural, political/ideological, cultural, contextual, situational and interactional. It distinguishes between ‘antecedent conditions (the ‘tinder’)’ and specific and situated ‘interpersonal interaction (the ‘spark’)’ (ibid. 2). The model helps to explain why a volatile situation ignites (or not) depending on localised interaction which is mediated through the broader levels. The model has been critiqued on a number of counts (see King & Waddington 2005 for an overview) and there is a need to recognise that there may be multiple ‘flashpoints’.

Media coverage is factored into the ‘contextual’ level and affects actors’ ‘calculations of trouble’ (D. Waddington 2007: 21). This process is, however, rather underspecified. In this paper we illustrate how newspaper coverage intersects with protest policing, and contributes to what Della Porta & Fillieule (2004) term ‘police knowledge’. They argue that the police generate stereotypes and short-hands which frame their understanding of who they are confronting and note that these forms of knowledge are a key variable in the policing of protest. Gorringer & Rosie’s (2008) research on protest policing at the 2005 G8 summit echoes these findings and notes how police perceptions of differing groups (their legitimacy, objectives and tactics) has a significant bearing on how a protest event is policed. These perceptions are shaped in part by the history of interactions between specific protestors and police and by the willingness (or otherwise) of protestors to engage with the law enforcement authorities. These perceptions are generated in the context of an increase in police powers (both conventional and anti-terrorism) and heated debates about the erosion of civil liberties (Moran 2007). Moran (ibid: 409) highlights the potential dangers of these powers in noting how the term ‘terrorism’ has been extended to apply to ‘violent industrial disputes and animal rights protestors’. This is clearly an important contextual factor for understanding the policing strategies deployed in London in 2009, but our focus is on how such techniques are legitimised for use against political protestors. We contend that it is not international summits that are policed differently (since different protesters are treated differently) so much as anti-systemic or anarchist protests who have been turned into contemporary folk-devils.

Earl & Soule (2006) point to the police’s fear of ‘losing control’ as contributing to repressive policing. P. Waddington (1993), consequently, advocates paramilitary style policing with clear lines of command and control to ensure professionalism and discipline. Jefferson (1990), by contrast, insists that paramilitary methods can exacerbate violence. The case for paramilitary policing assumes that officers get carried away in the heat of the moment, but it is clear that apprehension about particular groups may predate and help shape police strategies. The antecedents of these preconceptions, thus, are critical. Police training, briefings and understandings of crowd psychology deserve scrutiny (cf. Reicher 2009) and were considered in the media furore surrounding the G20. Little space though was accorded to media’s role in shaping protest events. The way in which an event is *framed*, however, has significant ramifications:

Framing refers to the deliberate or unintentional deployment of specific properties of a news narrative which encourages people perceiving and thinking about events to develop particular understandings of them (McFarlane & Hay 2003:217)

By reference to public order policing, Juris argues that ‘the mass media tend to construct militant protest in particular as dangerous and criminal’ (2005: 423). Rosie & Gorringer (2009: 42) likewise note that “‘Genoa’ and ‘anarchist’ have become media short-hands invoking a ‘dangerous’ folk devil’. The media, of course, is clearly not monolithic and, following Murdock (1973: 158), we are not suggesting a deliberate ‘conspiracy’ to discredit protestors or defend police authorities. Media coverage, however, helps construct social meanings ‘by associating certain words with certain problems and issues’ (Althiede 2006: 419). It is clear that particular certain frames and media short-hands predominate and that coverage of protest events tends to be ‘episodic’ – focusing on ‘newsworthy’ and often sensationalised stories and images – rather than thematic (Smith et al 2001).

The impact of such coverage is open to debate. There is some suggestion that the presence of reporters (especially TV crews) can result in more consensual policing (Doyle 2003: 11). The significance accorded to television coverage reflects the sense that the police may influence news production (ibid 28), but cannot control live coverage or people’s interpretation of it. An appreciation of this has helped fuel the rise of an activist media (cf. De Jong et al, 2005) which were to the fore in the events of 1 April 2009. Several studies address similar questions relating to news coverage of events (Murdock 1973, Smith et al 2001), but few reflect upon the mediated *context* within which protest occurs. Of interest here is the extent to which the media exaggerates or dispels fears in the days and months *preceding* any event.

We contend that the analysis of media context is essential to a full understanding of any given protest. As one officer pithily noted with regard to sensationalised coverage prior to the 2005 G8 demonstrations: ‘Cops read papers too’ (Gorringer & Rosie, 2008:699). Given the significance of police knowledge and anticipation of trouble to protest policing, anticipatory coverage is, if anything, more important than how an event itself is reported. Reicher et al (2004) highlight the dangers of treating crowds and crowd members as homogeneous and problematic, but media forecasts of violence can reinforce such tendencies. In terms of the flashpoints model, we would argue that more attention should be given to this crucial ‘level of structuration’. The media context, furthermore, potentially shapes both public opinion (Weakliem 2003) and the protest event as well. There is a danger that sensationalised stories can become self-fulfilling: they can reinforce the residual attachment to discredited understandings of the ‘madding crowd’ (cf. Schweingruber 2000) meaning that police forces view protestors as liable to turn into a mob. Such understandings correlate with more aggressive and heavy-handed police responses. Secondly, they can alter the make up of a protest constituency – deterring those who wish to make their views heard but are wary of violence – and reinforce its sense of coherence and oppositional identity (Reicher et al 2004).

The mediated context is important for another reason. A series of recent studies portray mass media as the arena in which the politics of dissent are played out, and increasingly argue that contemporary news media offer opportunities for activists to get their points across (De Jong et al 2005, Juris 2005). Cottle (2008: 853) argues that ‘protests and demonstrations today have become reflexively conditioned by their pursuit of media attention’. Whilst this is true of most protestors, there is a parallel trend for radical activists to create their own media outlets and means of communication (CounterSpin Collective 2005). The events of April 2009 are interesting in large part because of the intersection between these two media and the forms of activism that the creation of an activist media has created. Rather than Doyle’s (2003) focus on the ‘calming’ influence of television, we contend that the ubiquitous presence of digital recorders and camera ‘phones transformed the *interpretation* of this event.

### ***The gathering storm ...***

In what follows we offer an analysis of newspaper coverage preceding, during and shortly after the G20 summit in April 2009. We used the LexisNexis<sup>2</sup> newspaper database to search articles within 149 UK-based newspapers. We searched for all articles containing the terms ‘G20’, ‘policing’, ‘anarchist’ or ‘protest’ between January and April 2009. In selecting articles our intention was to illustrate prevalent patterns in the mainstream press. The aim is to highlight the *volte face* in reporting that followed Tomlinson’s death and to critically analyse the role of the media rather than to offer a comprehensive account of all coverage. This may mean that we sometimes neglect the (all too rare) insights of thoughtful commentators but we contend that the articles analysed below offers a fair reflection of the overarching tone of newspaper coverage.

Our prior research has noted the tendency of many reports – and not simply within ‘sensationalist’ tabloids – to frame a wide range of upcoming protests in terms of dangerous ‘anarchists’. Even the most respectable of protest organisations are reported within this frame, in that they may (unwittingly ) provide cover for ‘illegitimate’ protest activities. This ubiquity of this trope led us to conclude that:

The [dangerous ‘anarchist’] folk devil, clearly, is well established. The efficacy of the short-hand is such that sensationalist stories - so long as they conform to and confirm established stereotypes - can be constructed on the thinnest of evidence. An incessant association of ‘anarchism’ with violence facilitates moral panic about ‘illegitimate’, ‘unauthorised’ and ‘unjustified’ forms of political action.  
(Rosie & Gorringer, 2009:47)

Identical media habits were all too evident prior to London’s G20 protests. In late March 2009 the *Times* headlined that London “prepares for summit street battle; Hundreds of anti-capitalists plan to besiege bank”:



Scotland Yard issued a stark warning of violent disorder in the City of London on the eve of the G20 summit, with the police stretched to their limit in the middle of an extraordinary week of public protest. Anarchists, environmentalists and anti-globalisation groups are collaborating to mount an "unprecedented" sequence of demonstrations across London and police chiefs fear that they will be playing cat and mouse with militants. (O'Neill, 2009)

The following day the *Observer* noted that London office workers "face chaos next week with swaths of London in security lockdown":

Details of direct action, gleaned from chatter on anarchist websites and meetings attended by the *Observer*, include a rumoured plan to block the Blackwall Tunnel and cause a security scare on the London Underground by leaving bags unattended on trains. There is also speculation that protesters will drive a tank to the ExCeL conference centre in London's Docklands, where the G20 are meeting, and attempt to harass politicians with wake-up calls to their hotels in the middle of the night. None of the organisers of the peaceful demonstrations say they are aware of any such tactics. (Smith & Rogers, 2009)

In addition to such 'details' – which attentive readers may have noted derived from 'chatter', 'rumour' and 'speculation' – the report noted "growing fears for the safety of people going to work"; worries that public transport would be "paralysed"; and that businesses expected "losses worth millions". Lest all this should be seen as merely speculative, the *Observer* quoted a source from within a "leading protest group":

Anti-capitalist groups believe the recession and spiralling unemployment will encourage an uprising not seen since the poll tax riots, causing embarrassment to Gordon Brown as he hosts world leaders. Chris Knight, of the leading protest group *Government of the Dead*, warned: "The revolution is coming. This is our time, and I honestly believe that the army, the police, will be so intent on keeping the ExCeL centre they will lose the City of London." (Smith & Rogers, 2009)

Almost as an afterthought the article concluded:

On Saturday, *Put People First*, a campaign group involving the TUC and 120 other organisations, will hold a separate march and rally in Hyde Park calling on G20 world leaders to ensure decent jobs and public services for all. (Smith & Rogers, 2009)

Our point here is not so much that the 'anarchist' frame is utilised by even 'serious' newspapers – after all, like its rivals the *Observer* has to shift units – but that this frame comes to *dominate* protest related news. It may seem surprising that the *Observer* declares *Government of the Dead* as a "leading protest group" whilst largely ignoring *Put People First* (a broad coalition of trade unions, faith groups, NGOs and charities) but 'anarchists' make better

copy than trade unionists. The other issue to note is the scattergun approach to prospective anarchist ‘outrages’ without any careful assessment of which are actually likely to transpire. After all, the Bank of England *was* surrounded by activists (though hardly besieged) and a branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland *was* broken into. However, the press habit lies in listing a multitude of possible actions – thus making headlines - rather than investigating and reporting ‘hard news’.

We can illustrate this more clearly through the coverage in the *Sunday Times* (the UK’s highest selling Sunday ‘quality’ newspaper) the day after 35,000 marched, entirely peaceably, in support of *Put People First*. The march received almost no coverage: a short (300 word) piece dismissed marchers as aiming to pin “anything they could blame on Gordon Brown” (Woods, 2009). Rather more space was given to upcoming protests. An article headlined “G20 protestors face police with Tasers” (and rather more grotesquely in the first edition as “Police to use stun guns on G20 protesters”) focussed upon “violent demonstrators planning to disrupt this week’s G20 summit”. The decision to issue police with Tasers is neither problematised nor questioned and the sympathies of the article are perhaps seen in the link to Daniel Finkelstein’s blog inviting those ‘annoyed about the G20 riots [*sic*] to have a rant about it here’.<sup>3</sup> The article concluded: “The organisers of the protests - an alliance of environmental campaigners, anticapitalist and religious groups - insist they will be peaceful. However, police fear that anarchist elements are likely to stir up trouble.” (Leppard & Swinford, 1999). The ‘paper then describes nine protest groups under the sub heading “Who’s Protesting”. The list was ordered not in terms of size or influence, but in terms of their ‘dangerous’ exoticism: *London Anarchists*; *Whitechapel Anarchists*; and the ‘veteran anarchists’ of *Class War* were listed first. Bottom of the list were the rather larger, but less copy-friendly, *People and Planet*; the *Stop the War Coalition*; and *CND* (Leppard & Swinford, 1999).

On the same day the *Sunday Mirror*, under the headline “Anarchy back in the UK” reproduced police briefings that anarchist veterans “from the 1990 Poll Tax riots” and “Rent-a-mob hooligans from the 2001 May Day riots” were “coming out of retirement to plot mayhem” and “wreak carnage” (Penrose, 2009). Again the main organisations involved in planning the protests – not to mention their arguments and proposed policies – were entirely ignored in favour of a focus on the ‘extreme’. Our decision to counterpose the 2005 G8 Summit to the 2009 G20 in the introduction is a deliberate inversion of the common strategy to ‘locate’ protest by reference to ‘notorious’ events in the past. Though Gleneagles was a more recent exemplar the headlines here hark back to 1990 or 2001. Should the paper have wanted a London specific example, though, the 2003 Stop the War demonstration (one of the largest ever seen in Britain) would have sufficed ... but for the absence of violence.

A media tendency to prioritise ‘sensational’ and violent themes, to report rumour and ‘anticipated disorder’ rather than to report actual (and often disappointingly peaceful) events is well documented (Donson et al 2004; Juris 2005; Murdock 1973; Rosie & Gorringer 2009). From this perspective, press habits prior to the G20 are entirely in line with what we might have expected. They highlighted themes of conspiratorial, secretive and dangerous protestors

and a concomitant para-militarization of the policing. Lost in the coverage, were 'legitimate' and 'peaceful' protest organisations, their motivations and policies. Their role, if they are assigned one, is as naïve dupes of the folk devil. In much coverage this is merely implicit, but in some it is headline news: "Anarchists planning to storm City banks: *They will masquerade as peaceful demonstrators*" (Dominiczak & Lefley, 2009 – emphases added. The same claim is made by Edwards & Gammell, 2009).

Our focus on such coverage is intended not just as an illustration of dominant media frames, but as a reflection on the environment within which protest occurs. One must feel some sympathy for front-line officers, nervous at what will face them in protest situations, and 'reminded' that the anarchist enemy need not *look* like an anarchist, but like a peaceful protestor, a curious onlooker, or an innocent bystander. These constructions shape the context within which the policing of protest occurs both by reinforcing the image of a folk-devil and by legitimating forceful policing.

### ***The morning after the night before***

If media tropes prior to the G20 summit were predictable, so too were those in the first few days of protest and in their immediate aftermath. On the morning of 1 April the *Daily Telegraph* warned that London faced "two days of chaos and disruption" (Edwards & Gammell, 2009). The *Times* noted that police were called to "man [the] barricades" in "Fortress London", whilst the *Scotsman* claimed that the city faced its "biggest security operation since WW2" (Webster & Baldwin, 2009; Peev, 2009). Later the *Evening Standard* reported that "Violence sweeps City ..." with protestors unleashing "Bank rage" (Davenport & Randhawa, 2009a, 2009b). A branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland was broken into, but footage of the incident belies the predictions of secretive anarchists leading forays from within a peaceful crowd. Rather, we see a large group of onlookers, a disproportionate number of whom have cameras, gathered round as others openly smash their way in. The restraint of the majority of protestors is seen in that only four people were charged in this case.<sup>4</sup> Later it emerged that one man had died during the day, although the BBC noted only that he "died after collapsing, police said"<sup>5</sup>.

Few reports on 2 April hinted at controversy over the death, focussing instead on protest violence and the behaviour of protestors. Late on 1 April a Metropolitan Police press release noted that "officers took the decision to move [the fatally injured man] as during this time a number of missiles - believed to be bottles - were being thrown at them"<sup>6</sup>. Many newspapers ran with the story of officers tending to a stricken man being "... pelted with bottles and forced to retreat" (Edwards et al, 2009); "As police officers tried in vain to revive the man they were pelted with bottles by a screaming mob" (Turnbull & Gregory, 2009). As Doyle (2003) found, police briefings carry authority and are often accepted without corroboration.

Early reports, in other words, are fully in line with the dominant frame as noted in the HPIC quote at the head of this paper. Nothing in the actions of police or protesters was sufficient to challenge the accepted wisdom at this stage and the coverage's over-riding motif was violence. The *Daily Mail* led

with “Bloodshed as mobs turn on the police” noting that “masked anarchists” had sought to “hijack protests”. Despite this sensational headline, the *Mail* conceded that the demonstrations were considerably smaller than anticipated, with protestors heavily outnumbered by police. Nevertheless, the *Mail* projected fears further into the Summit week:

Senior police said last night that they feared yesterday's protests were a 'dry run' for further disturbances, noting that 'riot generals' had been seen orchestrating violence ... Among the crowds yesterday were groups ... in what police called the 'uniform of anarchists' dark top, trousers and boots with hat and mask. Larger demonstrations are planned today and tomorrow ... (Williams et al, 2009)

Violence, when it fails to materialise as predicted, can thus simply be shifted forward in time, with the added spice that disorder already witnessed can be ‘spun’ into a ‘dry run’ orchestrated by sinister ‘riot generals’.

There are two things to note about the *Mail*’s coverage. First, it illustrates the flexibility of an ‘anarchist’ folk devil that is simultaneously dangerously *invisible* (in that anarchists can so easily ‘masquerade’ as peaceful protestors) and all too *visible*. Thus the ‘obvious’ and ‘uniformed’ anarchists dominating the photographs and video clips accompanying protest reportage serve, ironically, to underpin the wider ‘truth’ of dangerous, secretive, invisible anarchists<sup>7</sup>. Second is the related figure of the ‘riot general’ whose existence intimates sinister and well-organised groups. This is illustrated by a ‘special investigation’ carried by the *Mail* on 2 April. Journalist Arthur Martin revealed how he had gone “Undercover with the anarchist mob”, to find himself on 1 April:

Penned in among a fearsome group of thugs outside the Bank of England, dressed head to toe in black, I was one of the mob. Our faces covered with scarves and balaclavas, we were part of a surging wave of violence. Glass bottles, bricks and chairs went flying through the air.

Martin spent a month in “anarchist attire – black hoodie, dark scruffy jeans and trainers” - infiltrating the “secretive discussions” of “hate-filled anarchists ... angry men ... [a] bizarre group of misfits”. At these “war summits” assembled anarchists were given their “latest orders” from “a 66-year old anthropology lecturer ... content to pull strings behind the scenes and let others do his dirty work” (Martin, 2009). <sup>8</sup>

This lurid picture is laden with contradiction. The motley bunch are presented as “misfits”, without ideological purpose or sophistication, simply out for a ‘ruck’. Yet can these be the same ‘misfits’ who so expertly – and secretively – serve to undermine legitimate protest and the fabric of capitalism? The answer was found in the pages of the *Telegraph* on 2 April:

Fears of organised riots, which had led to the deployment of 5,000 police officers, proved unfounded as the vast majority of demonstrators

refused to be lead by a small cadre of around 40 anarchists intent on stirring up trouble. (Edwards et al, 2009)

### ***What a difference a death makes ...***

By 3 April, two days after the ‘Fools Day’ disturbances, there was a noticeable shift in the tone of some coverage. This was most marked in the *Guardian*, which gave over considerable space to police tactics’:

Outside the Bank of England [on 1 April], thousands were held for up to eight hours behind a police cordon, in a practice known as ‘kettling’. Parents with children and passers-by were told by officers on the cordon that ‘no one could leave’. According to witnesses, when they were finally allowed to go on Wednesday night, they were ordered to provide names and addresses and have their pictures taken. If they refused, they were sent back behind the cordon. (Laville & Duncan, 2009)

A feature essay in the same edition was exceptionally critical of ‘kettling’:

... why were the crowd given no instructions as to where they should go or when? The area became a public lavatory ... The containment was backed up at the Bank of England, first with mounted police and then with police dogs, ramping up tensions and fuelling further bloody confrontations. (Campbell 2009)

The *Times* carried a highly critical account from one of their own journalists who had endured “seven hours of detention without food or water” within the kettle:

The police tactics were simple. At the first hint of trouble, they enacted a long-planned strategy – trapping and detaining all the protestors, violent or not ... Once established the cordon slowly squeezed – each police charge rolling past any protestors who refused to move, battering them. No one was released. If I were to design a system to provoke and alienate, I could not do better”. (Whipple 2009)

The journalist argued that police tactics contributed significantly to “the story of how a largely peaceful protest ... eventually turned violent”: “Just as the people who attacked the officers were idiots, so the actions of the police made that violence inevitable” (Whipple 2009).

Within a day or so, therefore, the mood within some newspapers (and not only those on the liberal-left) had shifted substantially from a focus on (anticipated) protestor violence and towards police tactics. Two contributory factors are the experiences of journalists within the ‘kettles’ and the willingness of activists to air their concerns through the media (cf. Cottle 2008). Neither of these, we contend, is unprecedented or capable of shifting

the media gaze so comprehensively. The key issue was undoubtedly the death of Ian Tomlinson; protest-related deaths (or indeed serious injuries) are mercifully rare in Britain. That the death had shifted the goalposts was made explicitly clear by the *Guardian*, whose main feature began with reference to the 1979 death of anti-fascist Blair Peach at the hands of an unidentified Metropolitan Police officer:

Another 30 years, another demonstration, another death, albeit one that appears to have no link at all to violence by either police or demonstrators. Once again, however, the policing of the protest is under scrutiny. (Campbell 2009)

Notably, the shift in tone occurred when Tomlinson's death was still seen as accidental. The Metropolitan Police's response to this scrutiny and the emerging criticisms over 'kettling' is illuminating. Commander Simon O'Brien insisted that the tactic had been employed only in response to violence, and that peaceful protestors and passers-by thus corralled were free to leave:

There was no real deliberate attempt to say 'you are all going to stay here for hours' ... What I saw ... at that time [towards the end of several hours of 'kettling'] was a couple of hundred people who did not want to go. They had been the agitators throughout the day. (quoted in Laville & Duncan, 2009)

We were attempting to keep certain groups and individuals apart. Those who wanted to leave could, and those who wanted to stay and make their point, we facilitated that. (quoted in Davenport 2009)

As the *Guardian* drily noted, their journalists "saw and spoke to many people who were clearly not agitators, but who were refused permission to leave" (Laville & Duncan, 2009) <sup>9</sup>. If O'Brien's position - that kettling *facilitated* protest - read clumsily on 3 April, it was to seem utterly outlandish as the police version of events unravelled.

Over the next week a number of complaints about police violence emerged, accompanied by allegations that there had been at least one – and perhaps several – altercations between Ian Tomlinson and police officers prior to his death. On Tuesday 7 April the *Guardian* published video footage which showed Tomlinson walking away from officers with his hands in his pockets. An officer strikes him behind the knees with his baton, and then violently shoves Tomlinson in the back sending him sprawling. None of the surrounding officers assist him to his feet or reprimand their colleague.<sup>10</sup> Several moments later, Tomlinson collapsed. A second post-mortem suggested that the cause of death was not a heart attack, but internal bleeding. Police claims of officers being attacked by protestors as they sought to resuscitate Tomlinson were flatly contradicted by video evidence.

If the very fact of a protest-related death was sufficient to spark a change of media tone, the emerging evidence ensured that police tactics were subjected to intensely critical scrutiny. It became clear that Tomlinson had died shortly after being assaulted by a police officer. Senior police officers, far from

curtailing 'disorganised forays by individual police officers' (P. Waddington 1993: 366), had at best obfuscated the circumstances, and at worst had deliberately sought to mislead. Compellingly, Tomlinson was very much a 'passer-by', innocently caught up in the police 'kettle'. Trying to get home, following his usual route from work, Tomlinson found himself trapped within lines of riot-clad police officers. It would seem that his attempts to leave – notwithstanding Commander O'Brien's claim that people were 'free to leave' – were repeatedly blocked by a police operation which, by accident or design, treated *all* within the cordon as 'suspect'. As the chairman of the Metropolitan Police Federation told BBC Radio 4:

On a day like that, where there are some protesters who are quite clearly hell-bent on causing as much trouble as they can, there is inevitably going to be some physical confrontation. Sometimes it isn't clear, as a police officer, who is a protester and who is not. I know it's a generalisation but anybody in that part of the town at that time, the assumption would be that they are part of the protest. I accept that's perhaps not a clever assumption but it's a natural one.<sup>11</sup>

Implicit and unquestioned in this statement is the suggestion that the actions of the police would have been justified *had* Tomlinson been a protestor. Encapsulated in this quote, as Reicher (2009) notes, is the belief that anyone in the area is a troublemaker – either because 'decent' people would have left or because they are susceptible to the psychology of the crowd. In the weeks and months since the G20, the press have built up a picture of other instances where police have acted with violent aggression and seen protestors as 'fair game'.<sup>12</sup> The attention directed towards police tactics and attitudes is both welcome and overdue, and police briefings and training must be reconsidered. Mostly absent from these debates, however, is any introspection or analysis of the role of the press (but see Porter 2009). We contend that this critical analysis of policing is overdue in part because similar tactics, actions and assumptions have been overlooked, forgiven or even encouraged by the media in the past. As Marx noted in response to the U.S. urban riots of the 1960s: 'Knowledge that they are unlikely to be subjected to post-riot sanctioning may have lessened restraints on their use of violence' (Quoted in D. Waddington 2007: 27).

## **Conclusion**

The fallout from the G20 has cast a spotlight onto public order policing that promises to change the way protest events are approached. Even the internal report by HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary, which praises the 'considerable collective achievement by the MPS [Metropolitan Police Service]' (HMIC 2009: 39) has been critical of aspects of the police operation. The report highlights the oft neglected requirement for MPS officers to wear identification numbers (p57), and the need to communicate better (or indeed at all) with those caught up in 'kettles' (p54). Overall, the report details the difficulties of contemporary protest policing but stresses the need to facilitate 'peaceful protest throughout the planning process and execution of the

operation' (p47). For all the emphasis on 'adapting to protest' and updating police tactics and procedures, the report has little to suggest by way of innovation. Indeed the recommendations on kettling (p54) echo those made before and ignored.

Of particular concern to us here, furthermore, is the focus on the facilitation of 'peaceful protest'. This terminology is problematic on two related counts: firstly it gives police officers the discretion to determine who is and is not a 'peaceful protestor'. As we have shown elsewhere (Gorringer & Rosie 2008) the police have a preconceived idea of which kind of protestor, and which kind of causes, are legitimate. The second danger, as we have demonstrated above, is that *all* protestors can be (and often are) presented as potentially violent.<sup>13</sup> The report paves the way for 'business-as-usual' in the policing of 'anarchists' or similar folk-devils. Whilst we hope that the various reports into the G20, and the charges brought against one officer for assault<sup>14</sup> prompt a rethink of the policing tactics and approaches to protest, we would argue that this needs to include an alteration in attitudes towards anti-systemic protestors too. This point brings the media back into the picture.

The HMIC report emphasises the importance of communication about and during protest events between police, protestors and the public. This is hardly a new idea (Jefferson 1990, Reicher et al 2004, Gorringer & Rosie 2008). One reason why it has taken the G20 to bring this to the fore is that a primary channel of communication between the three parties – the mass media – has contributed to stoking up fears. Better communication alone will achieve little whilst there is a residual attachment to notions of the madding crowd. The perception that protestors can turn into an undifferentiated mob is captured in assertions that 'dangerous anarchists' may 'masquerade' as peaceful protestors and feeds into homogenising policing strategies that alienate protestors and help create the conditions for violence. It is these unchallenged assumptions, we contend, that meant that 'the initial media perception of the police operation was predominantly positive' (HMIC 2009: 65). But for the loss of life and the intervention of innumerable 'citizen journalists' (Porter 2009) the matter may have rested there.

Reflecting on alarmist stories during the build up to the 2005 G8 meeting in Gleneagles, one of Scotland's more thoughtful columnists warned:

Relentless forecasts of imminent violence tend to attract precisely the violent elements you don't want to come while deterring peaceful demonstrators. Lurid coverage is itself a threat to public order. Remember that if the bottles fly in July. (MacWhirter, 2005)

It is worth recalling this now that the riot shields and batons have been wielded in anger too. Press coverage since the death of Ian Tomlinson has focussed more on policing than on protest. Indeed, reports into protests at Stonehenge (e.g. Morris 2009) and London's Climate Camp in August 2009 emphasised the need for a different style of policing. Channel 4's Dispatches programme (see note 13) portrayed the policing at Climate Camp as informed by and in complete contrast to the G20 operation. There has also been extensive commentary on the HMIC report. The events of April 2009 have



received ongoing attention, not least in terms of official investigation into the actions of individual police officers (see, e.g., reports on the criminal charges laid against one officer in September 2009)<sup>15</sup>. ‘Traumatic events’ as della Porta notes, ‘can stimulate learning processes’ (in D. Waddington 2007: 32), and the police response to the Climate Camp on Blackheath in August 2009 suggested that lessons may well have been learned.<sup>16</sup> Whilst our focus in this paper is on the interplay between media coverage and policing rather than on the policing *per se*, several principles for protest policing arise from our analysis. Though they are already enshrined in the Association of Chief Police Officer’s manual (Reicher 2009: 13) they are worth restating.

Firstly, it is clear that treating all protesters as an undifferentiated mass is ineffective (it did not prevent the attack on the RBS for instance) and can escalate a situation. Police training and briefing could clearly do more to reinforce this point, and better communication *during* protests can help differentiate between protestors and explain what is happening. Finally, the events at the G20 demonstrate that a paramilitary police force is only as disciplined as its commanding officers. The failure of senior police officers to reign in or reprimand those lashing out at protestors and the assumptions articulated in the quotes above indicate the need for institutional reform rather than pinning the blame on a few bad apples.

Whilst it is tempting to view the G20 as a landmark event that has changed the contours of protest policing and reportage, the media attention cycle is notoriously short. Once interest in the G20 fades, there is no guarantee against a return to earlier practices. In this context it will be interesting to chart the coverage accorded to future protests. Writing in the *Guardian* Porter (2009) notes the culpability of the media in foretelling violence and insists that ‘this predictive briefing must also end’. Following our analysis of G20 coverage we would contend that it is not just the briefing that needs to end: it is the downplaying of police reassurances *before* an event and the privileging of official accounts in the aftermath; it is the search for violence even if none is apparent; it is in the inflation of internet murmurs into hard facts and in the resolute portrayal of ‘anarchists’ as violent, dangerous and out to cause chaos. It will mean focusing on banal facts over spectacular images or headlines. If we are not to see a repeat of the tragic events of 1 April 2009, it is not just the police who need to rethink their approach to protest, it is the media too.

<sup>1</sup> See < <http://www.putpeoplefirst.org.uk> >

<sup>2</sup> (<<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/xchange-international/>>). Although aware of the problems in media indexing systems (cf. Earl *et al* 2004), LexisNexis allowed us to study a wider selection of newspapers than we would have otherwise been able to capture.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/G20/article5993139.ece>

<sup>4</sup> See <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/G20/article6016126.ece>> for footage and <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financetopics/g20-summit/5096877/G20-protests-Four-charged-over-RBS-attack.html>> for details on arrests and damage (Both Accessed 28 August 2009)..

<sup>5</sup> ‘Police clash with G20 protesters’ (Wednesday, 1 April 2009 23:53 UK), <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7977489.stm>> (accessed 26 May 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Press release cited in full in the *Guardian Online*: ‘G20 fatality: How police view of Ian Tomlinson death changed’, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/apr/08/ian-tomlinson-g20-death-official-police-account>> (accessed 26 May 2009)

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<sup>7</sup> See the *Evening Standard's* report – the day after they warned that anarchists would ‘masquerade as peaceful demonstrators’ – of a ‘secret memo’ issued by British Transport Police. This urged railway staff “to report anarchists arriving in the capital by train ... The memo suggests activists can be identified by their appearance – such as large numbers of people wearing similar coloured clothing or else carrying large banners ...” (Davenport & Lefley, 2009)

8 In March 2009 the University of East London suspended Professor Chris Knight, leading figure within *Government of the Dead*, after comments made on BBC radio – see ‘G20 protest professor suspended’, BBC News 26 March 2009, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7967096.stm>> , accessed, 27 May 2009

<sup>9</sup> The current authors’ own direct experience of ‘kettling’ – in Edinburgh during the 2005 G8 protests – very closely matches the experiences described in the *Guardian* and the *Times*.

<sup>10</sup> <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/video/2009/apr/07/g20-police-assault-video>> (7th April 2009) (accessed 03 July 2009)

<sup>11</sup> <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/7989027.stm>> (8th April 2009) (accessed 03 July 2009)

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, the coverage of policing at Kingsnorth power station which was only fully picked up *after* the G20 furore: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/video/2009/jun/21/fit-watch-kingsnorth-arrests>>. See also the reports about attitudes towards protestors expressed on police blogs: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/apr/26/g20-police-blog-assault>> (Both accessed 07 July 2009).

<sup>13</sup> A Channel 4’s *Dispatches* programme on police public order training reinforced this view in illustrating how officers are prepared for the worst case scenario (‘Ready for a Riot’, broadcast 19 October 2009. See <<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/episode-guide/series-39/episode-1>> (Accessed 27 October 2009):

<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/episode-guide/series-39/episode-1>

<sup>14</sup> A BBC report on this story notes that one officer is to be charged with assault whilst another remains suspended pending investigation: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8279001.stm>> (Accessed 27 October 2009)

<sup>15</sup> See <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8279001.stm>> (accessed 29 September 2009)

<sup>16</sup> See <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/aug/27/climate-camp-environment-activists-police>> (accessed 29 September 2009)

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